

June 05: World Environment Day

The Vedic perspective on environment



World Environment Day is a call to all stakeholders (individuals, enterprises, communities...) for “responsible conduct” in preserving and enhancing the environment.

Sustainability is a major issue as environmental decline is distressing to life. The hardest hit is at the well-being of human beings; despite the countless red lights, we continue to ignore the toll of human activity on the environment which caters for our physical sustenance and affords us the opportunity for intellectual, moral, social and spiritual growth.

The Veda, the revelation to humanity at the Creation has several references on ecological balance, weather cycles, rainfall, hydrologic cycle, and related subjects. These treasures of vast knowledge augured a high level of awareness of the seers and people on the protection of the environment:

- The earth is part of the Creation, the universe and need be treated with respect.
- Space, air, fire, water and earth as the five basic elements (*Panch-mahaaboota*) constitute the interconnected foundations sustaining life.
- The tenets of ethical living (*Dharma*) comprise of self-control (*Indriya-Nigraha*) and non-accumulation of material things beyond what is required (*Aparigraha*); a core “duty” to care for the earth and refrain from the over-exploitation of natural resources.
- The fundamentals of human life (*Dharma, Artha, Kaama*) advocate simple living for sustainable economies (at micro levels whose aggregate would be the macro-economy).

The Shaanti Paatha or Universal Prayer for Peace (YajurVeda 36.17) is an invocation for peace from inanimate and living beings ...*Dyau* - luminous bodies, *Prithivee* - earth, *Antariksha* - space, *Aapa* - waters, *Oshadhaya & Vanaspataya* – vegetation, etc.

It implies a win-win situation, where we should be, first the givers of peace, then be receivers of peace. Our wellbeing depends on the well-being of Mother Earth which in turn depends on the preservation and sustenance of the environment. Hence, we need (i) to connect with nature in a holistic manner, (ii) to promote harmonious and respectful behaviours towards each of the constituents and entities of our bounteous life-sustaining planet, and (iii) to maintain the natural assets as well as achieve a just

balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations of humanity.

The Vedic perspective provides a recipe for the subtle environment in the form of the *Pancha-mahaayajnya* (the five daily duties):

1. Brahmajajnya - daily prayers to the Almighty, Omnipresent, Omniscient, All-just and All-merciful Eeshvar (God, Creator of the Universe), the study of the Veda and allied scriptures, meditation and spirituality (spiritual reality) are beneficial to the mental environment.
2. Devayajnya – agnihotra or havan; the positive effects of oblations of clarified butter, fragrant and medicinal on the atmosphere, the vegetation and living beings around through sound-therapy (chanting of hymns), chroma-therapy (colors of the flames form the *havan kund* or fire pot), aroma-therapy (evaporation & sublimation dispersing the ingredients/oblations as micro-particles).
3. Pitriyajnya – respect and care of one's parents and the elderly for peace and harmony within the family.
4. Atithiyajnya - respecting and serving learned visitors who share their knowledge and experiences, thus boost our foundations and conviction to be ethical at all times.
5. Bali-vaishva-devayajnya - being compassionate and responsible to all other fellow species
Had we been prompt in this yajnya, extinct species and endangered species would not have entered our wordlist.

In the present day world, indigenous people are more respectful of the laws of nature. Civilization, in the pursuit of material pleasure is trying hard to overcome disease, old age, and death ...to overcome nature. Economic growth on the scale of increasing consumption was, is and will always be unsustainable: it is exhausting Mother Earth.

World Environment Day is time to examine our way of life...we do not exist in a vacuum, therefore the need to

- ^ Connect to our environment,
- ^ Protect people from the degradation of the quality of air and water,
- ^ Work for a sustainable future for all living and non-living things in the world,
- ^ Be aware that all individual efforts count when creating something that is greater than the sum of its parts,
- ^ Integrate Nature in day-to-day life, and
- ^ Connect the significance of the Vedic hymns on Creation (*Naasadiya Sukta*), Mother Earth (*Bhoomi Sukta*), Hydrology (*Parjanya Sukta*), Peace (*Shaanti Sukta*) in relation to the environment and act accordingly.

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